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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 000159

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PRIMARY TAG)

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TAGS: KDEM LE PGOV PREL FR IR

SUBJECT: FRANCE SEEKS EU COVER ON IRAN CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: STATE 2659

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt,  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche on January 16 to MFA Iran Desk Officer Arnaud Pescheux, who indicated that France had not budgeted any funds for democracy promotion in Iran. "If we were to do something, it would undoubtedly be via Brussels," Pescheux said. He noted that France "anticipated supporting" a proposal by Javier Solana for the EU to expand its own Farsi broadcasting capabilities, although he said that details of that proposal have yet to be worked out. While the MFA does not currently partner with any French NGOs operating in Iran, in the past a few NGOs (e.g., Reporters Without Borders) had brought members of Iranian civil society to France to participate in programs.

French Envoy to Tehran

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¶12. (C) Citing a press report in the January 16 edition of Le Monde, Poloff asked whether it was true that France planned to send a presidential envoy to Tehran in the near future. Choosing his words with care, Pescheux said that the Le Monde report was "not false" but stressed that a final decision had not yet been taken. Pescheux said that the envoy would not engage on the nuclear file but would instead discuss regional issues and, in particular, would seek to "find a solution on Lebanon."

¶13. (C) Poloff said he was shocked that France, which had steadfastly rejected entreaties to negotiate Lebanon's future with the Syrian regime, apparently found the prospect of conducting similar negotiations with Tehran less objectionable. Had the Iranians given the French some indication that they would be more forthcoming than Damascus?

No, Pescheux admitted, the Iranians had not tipped their hand; they had merely indicated that they were willing to talk.

Supreme Leader Still on Top

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¶14. (C) Turning to the results of Iran's recent elections, Pescheux indicated that the French were pleasantly surprised by the outcome (immediately prior to the election, their reporting from Tehran suggested that President Ahmadinejad's supporters were poised to make significant gains in the Assembly of Experts). The Quai's interpretation of the election results is that the axis between Supreme Leader Khamenei and former President Rafsanjani (i.e., the traditional conservatives) has been strengthened, with Khamenei remaining the supreme arbiter of Iran's political

balance of power. In an aside, Pescheux claimed that notwithstanding the French diplomatic presence in Tehran, the MFA has virtually no insight into the inner workings of the Pasdaran.

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